Benalto

Prepared and compiled by

Junior and Senior Room pupils

of the Benalto S.D. 1458

under the supervision of

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Land Map of the Benalto District

C.N.R.

C.P.R

Main Highway

L. Mitzner

W.O. Johnson

G. Ignatus

H. Talson

Mrs. M. Talson

E. Hill

A. Murto

Gr. Moki

N. Isaksen

H. Holstein

E. Hyvonen

John Son

Bros

D. Heikka

Mrs. E. Niemala

Arm strong Bros

Gr. Gilpatrick

J. Rebsfelt

Arm strong Bros.

A. Murto

C. Anderson

E. McKee

A. Lund

O. Huhtala

P. Burdick

L. Burdick

S. Anderson

T. Hambly

Waari Bros.

Mrs. Reunio

J. Heikka

Benalto

W. Holsworth

P. Burdick

C. Klind

96 A

Smith

Elspeth

Mary Neilson

C

D. Bennett

E. Opp

E.T. Neilson

G. Salonen

T. Smith

B. Leech

D.F. Neilson

Mary Neilson

J. Heikka

McBride

Roberts

Holsworth

Median

C. Feitl

M. Neilson

Leet

J. Watson

McNeil

D. Bratton

R. Hambly

R. Larrat

P.A. Stewart

Evarts

A. Staniforth

E. Little

F. Cuddehey

L. Jackson

Mac Pherson

C. Stauffer

Wells Bros.

D. Bratton

L. Kathol

Township line.

Pre-history of Benalto

We look back to the year 1910 when there was no such place as Benalto. The place where we live today was densely covered with brush. This dense brushland kept all pioneers on rut-dug bushland trails. These pioneers were not looking for townsites but for homesteads. At this time Evarts was the main point west of Red Deer. Evarts was situated on the Medicine River, four miles south of where Benalto now stands. Evarts almost being the size of Red Deer, and the only post west of Red Deer was a very busy centre. The only means of securing goods, mail and other supplies from Red Deer was by team. This fifty mile trip took about two or three days in and back. Evarts at this time consisted of an hotel, two stores, a creamery, a blacksmith shop, and a number of private homes. The main store keeper at Evarts was Mr. Simpson, one of the first pioneers of the district. Mr. Ed Watson ran the hotel at Evarts. Mr. Simpson built the first building in Benalto this being a store. There were a few settlers around in the district. Some of the main settlers were Wobio, Armstrongs, Wylie, Slacks, Ropsfelt, McKee, and Huhtala. In about 1910-1911 two railroad companies - the C.P.R. and the C.N.R. predicted a great farming country so they both immediately built railroads through to Rocky Mt. House.

The C.N.R. built their tracks to the north and the C.P.R. built theirs to the south. At a point about four miles north of Evarts the two railroads came through, these companies set out at once to establish townsites. McGregor the supt. of the C.P.R. at this time chose the townsite of Benalto and gave it its name. It is very important that we do not forget that the country surrounding was of very dense bush-land. The only means of transportation being by wagons on a rut-deep bushland trail. Thus we can see easily why these two companies put railroads through to Rocky Mt. House west of Red Deer. From the history told in the past lines we can see the great change that has taken place in this part of the country in the last thirty years.

Early Settlers

The pioneers that settled in the surrounding districts were of many nationalities. Some of the settlers came from Montana and Dakota and yet others came from their native land to Eastern Canada and later to the West. These people were farmers, lumberjacks and miners who came to the West in search of new lands. Many came from the Scandinavian countries because they lived under the Feudal system. Some were dodging the law. The earliest pioneers came in the years 1898 and 1899. Some of the earliest were Slack who came in 1899, the late Mr. Wylie -1900 Salonen - 1901; Isaac Johnson, Ropsfelt, and Huhtala in 1902; Armstrong brothers, and Warwicks in 1903.

The first settlers (the Gaetz brothers) came to Red Deer by covered wagons in 1897. The next settlers came by rail to Red Deer and from there continued on their trail with horses.

Some of the settlers brought wild horses with them, but could not make use of them until they were tamed. Mr.Hyvanen brought from New Finland in Saskatchewan, also from Montana, many horses. After they were tamed many were stolen by coyotes; and in 1905 horse rustling originated. Oxen were used to pull walking plows. Only a few horses were to be found in the locality. Wild hay was plentiful in swamps with which the cattle were fed.

The land was surveyed in 1901. Three years after it was filed it became the property of the farmer. Certain amounts of buildings and improvements such as 15 acres cultivated land surrounded by a fence had to be accomplished before the land was legally theirs.

Seed was not very difficult to obtain as most of the pioneers that came from the east brought seed with them. Seeding was done by hand although there were drills but the farmers were not in a position to buy them. Turkey Red was the first winter wheat raised. It was brought from the U.S.A. and was hauled to the nearest terminal located at Red Deer. Until 1904-1905 the grain was threshed by hand. In 1905 the first thresher appeared, having no blower or feeder and was fed by hand, also it was pulled and turned by oxen. The first steam thresher appeared in 1906.

Meat was plentiful before the Hudson Bay Company destroyed all the buffalo between here and Rocky. Deer and moose still remained.

Evarts was not built until 1903. Till this time settlers obtained their supplies from Red Deer. A trip to Red Deer and back took about 3 days. In 1896-98 the road was widened from a trail to a track making it wide enough for the Red River carts tobpass through.

The government gave the Hudson Bay Co. so much land in each township for clearing the brush and killing and destroying other trail hinderances. When the road was improved, travel became speedier and larger objects could be transported.

During the summer the people were occupied by clearing brush, seeding and threshing. In winter the men worked at Fernie, Frank B.C., Butte Montana, and other places, Many helped to construct the Grand Trunk railway from Edmonton through B.C. This railway went through in 1911-12.

In place of the present elevators beside the railway, were hundreds of tons of bailed hay in the year 1915 and later. These the farmers sold to the government at $9.50 a ton from which many of the wealthier farmers of today got their start.

This being one of the richest agricultural districts in Alberta high grade grains are produced. Many more farmers have inhabited brush covered land and today the surrounding district of Benalto is almost all cultivated land. From listening to the stories of many settlers you can realize that after travelling West and settling on a homestead they have endured the hardships and privations which was the lot of the early pioneers.

Railroad

The coming of the railroad solved many of the pioneers problems. By way of the railroad, machinery was transported to the West from Eastern Canada and U, S.A. Shipping of grains and cattle was made possible and the pioneers received their first car loads of coal from Nordegg.

Surveyors were first sent by the government to mark the best suited and cheapest route along which to lay the rails. The farmer had already filed land and the government had to buy the land from the farmers. The farmers were paid $30 to 100 dollars an acre for the land. The task of bringing the railroad was very difficult and much farm labour was used. The construction of the railroad west of Red Deer was started in 1909. One railway camp was North of the Melita school. This camp consisted of 300 men. Horse and mule teams were used to pull down trees and to grade the swampy sections. All the cement, bridge timber and feed for horses were hauled here from Red Deer. The timbers were about 40 feet long and they were used for building of bridges.

Ties were laid along on top of the grade. Then the first train came which had attacked to the front of it several flat cars. The cars contained rails and by means of rollers , rails were laid on the ties. The ties and rails were next spiked. The Golden Spike was driven in west of Red Deer. After the rails and ties were spiked, gravel was brought by train and the rails and ties had to be raised so that the gravel could be placed under them. This was done to highten the grade. The construction of the railroad was finished in 1913. The Railroad was once known as the Alberta Central.

Roads

Perhaps, if you would have been in this locality and would have seen the vast countryside all covered with brush, you would have wondered how the roads were made through brush land which seems impassible.

When the earliest settlers came here they followed the narrow trail today known as our highway. They had to break a new trail from this route to their filed claims. The first trails were made by the settlers at Rocky Mt. House who found it necessary to travel to Red Deer for supplies. The Hudson Bay Company received a certain amount of land in each township from the government to widen the trail. The thick brush was cut down and they destroyed and killed all other trail hinderances. Now the trail had been widened into a route wide enough on which Red River Carts could pass. The road was built through after the railroad. The road for some time was clay piled up to make a grade and in many places where there swamps it was sometimes impossible.

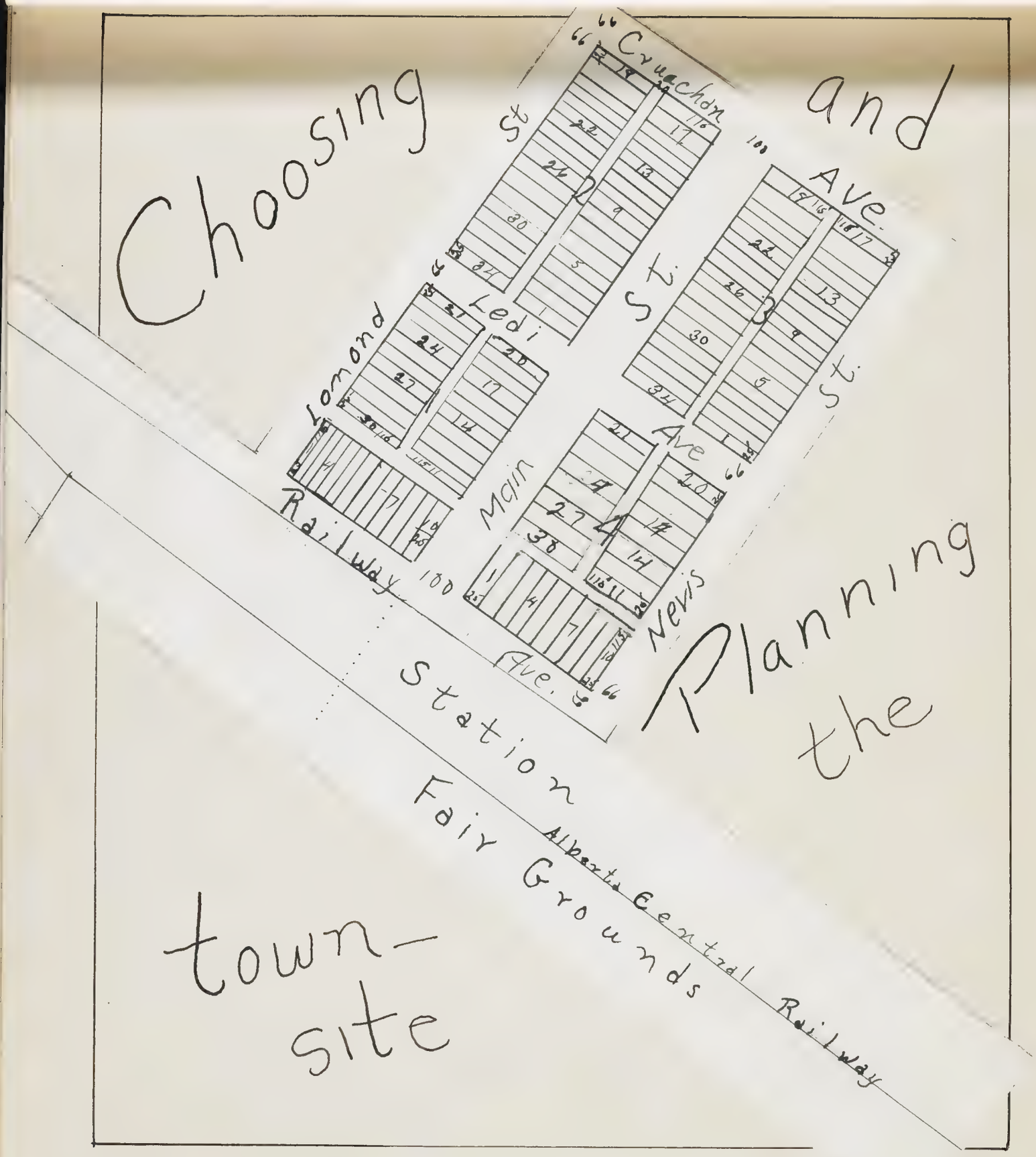
In the years 1930-1933 the Alberta government graded the road as far as Alhambra. Later it was gravelled to Rocky Mt. House. This highway has helped to build up the west and send out the produce of the surrounding district.

Melita School

Prior to the summer of 1904 there were not enough farmers in the district to ask the Department of Education to build a school. In the fall of 1904 the farmers in the surrounding country gathered at the home of Mr. Huhtala, for a meeting at which they elected a school board and made plans for building a school house. At this time the route for the railway had not been surveyed, so the school site was chosen on the main road, which is now a gravelled highway. Work on the school commenced in the summer of 1905 and by fall was ready for use. To this small one room school came all the children from the surrounding districts and in later years from the hamlet of Benalto. This school was known as "Melita School", Melita being a Greek name given in the Bible for the island of Malta, in the Mediterranean Sea.

The first teacher of the "Melita School" was Mr. J.M.McDonald. Grades one to nine were taught here until the Benalto School was built in 1938. The Melita School was moved away and has been remodelled and is now known as the New Centerville School.

Many successful men and women of today received part of their education at this school, and let us hope that in its new district, it will serve the children as well.


Choosing
and
Planning
the
town-
site
Cruachan
Ave.
St.
Ledi
Lomond
St.
Main
Ave.
Nevis
St.
Ave.
Railway
100
Station
Fair Grounds
Albert Central Railway

Let us stop and think---- A bushland country, a small hill, wild animals making their homes on the hillside, then, all of a sudden , men making a railroad, laughing, jesting, filling the air with laughter, disturbing the solitude of the small hill. It is hard to imagine that Benalto is on that same hill with just a few trees. But, Benalto would not be here if Mr. McGregor, a Scotchman, hadn't come out to the west to establish townsites.

Mr. McGregor and two groups of farmers had a conference in a small box car to decide where to establish Benalto. One group of farmers wanted a town where the cemetry stands now, and the other group wanted it where the former Melita School stood. Mr. McGregor, being obstinate and contrary pleased himself and placed it halfway between cemetry and Melita school. Mr. McGregor named it "Benalto!" The name is derived from a scotch name "Ben" which signifies a hill or elevation of land. This historic event took place in 1914, the year a bloody war broke out.

Mr. McGregor divided this bushland into four blocks, not all occupied at the present time. It seems strange to have avenues and streets in Benalto, but there were and are. The avenues run in a Northwest, south easterly direction, while the streets run in a North easterly, South westerly direction. The names of the avenues are: Railway, Ledi, Cruachan, and the streets are: Nevis, Lomond and Main Street. Railway Avenue runs parallel to the railroad track. All the stores are situated on this avenue. Cruachan Avenue runs on the Northwest of town, for such a quaint name, I must say it is never travelled on because it is not in existance. Ledi Avenue runs past our school. Lomond Street is the farthest west

street in Benalto. It is hardly ever travelled on except by a few worms, rabbits, etc. Main Street runs between our two grocery stores. The northern part of Benalto is not in existance because our small hamlet has not enough inhabitants to fill the large area. There are approximately one hundred inhabitants in Benalto which makes a fairly good sized hamlet.

Now our town is complete with avenues and streets, and to think that deer, rabbit, fox, etc. uaed to run across our avenues and streets is quite a stretch beyond our imagination.

Growth of Benalto

Original Depot

It is very interesting to learn how Benalto grew from a small clearing beside the railroad, into the busy hamlet it is today.

The first building in Benalto was a store, built by Mr. Simpson. The building still stands today, but it is now the Red and White Store operated by Mrs. Kinna.

The farmers has to have something upon which to weigh their stock before shipping it, so a scale was installed in front of Simpsons. This scale was used for many years and now stands in the stock yards.

The post office and telephone office was installed in the Red and White store.

A large bank was built in 1920. Then in 1926-27 it was used as a pool room and barber shop. The Simpson Bros. took over this building and built a second story, and used it as a store. The propietor of this store is today Mr. A. Foster.

In 1922 the Atlas Lumber Company built a lumber shed. In the same year Mr. Norton became station agent in Benalto. The station at this time was two box cars, then in 1929 the present station was built.

A hall was built west of the present hotel. Then it burned down in 1926. A new hotel was erected by Alec Karkenen. Mr. Buchanen and the late Mrs. Buchanen managed it for years. It is now managed by Mr. Lien.

In 1925 Mr. Hansen shipped a store by train from Red Deer and located it where Mr. Sterling's chicken ranch now stands. A few years later it burned down.

The K.P. was built between [illegible]'s and Hansen's store. This hall was also used for a church. It was later used for a cafe, then sold to Mr. Holsworth who tore it down. In 1925 the Benalto cafe was built which is now operated by Lore Kay.

Before 1918 the farmers had to load their hay and grain into box cars from a platform. In 1918 the first elevator was built, which was the A. P. Seven years later in 1925 the U.G.G. was built and in 1928 the Alberta Pool. The last elevator to be errected in Benalto was the Midland Pacific in 1930.

The first livery barn was managed by Mr. Brodersen. It was built north east of Foster's store, later it burned down and Mr. McGowan replaced it by building another one in the same place, where it still stands today.

At present there are about twenty-five homes in our hamlet and the population is about one hundred.

We can easily see how Benalto grew from one store at the side of the road into a thriving hamlet of today.

Agricultural Society

The Benalto Agricultural Society was formed in 1917. It was formed as a result of a meeting of a few energetic local farmers and a government representative who were endeavouring to get Agricultural Fairs started in different districts.

The first meeting was held in the same year with Mr. Simpson, Mr. McKee, Mr. Slack, Mr. Warwick, Mr. Talson, and the Armstrong Brothers and a few others. They chose for their first president Mr. McKee with his son Paul McKee as secretary. Since then the fair has grown from year to year and with addition of a stampede has attracted people from all over Canada and a number of cars are seen each year with United States license plates. Although the main objective of the society has been to improve live stock, etcetra, it has been a means of helping different organizations. The fair has been a means of giving to the Red Cross Society over $1000, and a similar amount to the Ladies Aid Society.

Although the Agricultural Society suffered like every other organization in the depression, a fair was held each year and is now able to boast of a five hundred dollar Victory Bond and a healthy bank balance.

The Agricultural Society is an asset to the community and has been a large factor in making Benalto the well known town that it is.

Benalto at Present.

Up until now, you have been told of Benalto past, so now let us tell you something about it at present.

Benalto, being a very small hamlet has a great deal of business compared to its size. There are four elevators, which take in more grain than any other hamlet or town for miles around. The agents of these elevators are: Mr. Hambly, Mr. Butterworth, Mr. Pugh and Mr. Reed. There are two general stores, "The Red and White" owned by Mrs. E. Kinna who also owns the post office . The other store is operated by Mr. A. J. Foster . A cafe is owned by Lore Kay, a licenced hotel operated by Mr. Lien, a hardware and lumber yard operated by Mr. Sterling; a blacksmith shop and two gas and oil agencies the managers being Mr. E. Nielsen and U. Lindequist, all these buildings help to compose Benalto. There is a Community Hall, skating and curling rinks, a Baptist church and about sixteen private homes. The population of the hamlet is about one hundred.

You may now see that Benalto is a progressive little hamlet and has many active societies, being the Agricultural Society, the Booster Club, The Canadian Red Cross, The Home and School association, The Presbyterian Ladies Aid and the Baptist Mission circle.

Every year they have a two day fair and stampede which draws large crowds from the surrounding districts. This is sponsored by the Agricultural Society.

By taking everything into consideration we can now form the conclusion that Benalto is a very thriving and pleasant place to live.

View

from

The U. G. G.

The West

Exhibition Grounds
Railroad

Present Benalto District

BENALTO DISTRICT!! Home of the most fertile farming districts in the whole province of Alberta. The people of Benalto district live under the emblem of the rose even though there are many nationalities such as: Finnish, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Scottish, English, and others. There are many hundreds of acres of cultivated land from which many millions of bushels of grain are exported to the Great Lakes making a huge amount of money circulating throughout the district. Many parts of the district are covered with dense bushland which aids to keep the animals in their natural environment.

In the present district the younger generation are coming into their own starting farming with knowledge that some have obtained from Agricultural Colleges.

The people are raising hogs, livestock, and grain to help the war effort and to supply the hungry people of other countries with bacon and other meats.

On the modern farms in the district approximately 2% have electricity and running water system, and 98% without these conveniences.

Benalto district is well supplied with water in spring, and a great deal of warmth in summer which gives wonderful crops to the farmers.

With the increase of population, the Benalto district will become a prosperous district, exporting and communicating with distant lands.

Benalto School

The children of Benalto receive their education at a beautiful little building known as the Benalto School. This school was constructed in the fall of 1938. Prior to this, all the education had been received in the Old Melita school.

A small inaugurational ceremony was held in the hall on November seventh with many parents attending.

This school was a big help in the development of Benalto. It enabled the children to receive most of their education, and send them from the school as successful men and women.

On November eighth excited pupils flocked to the school to commence their first year in the new school.

Our school consists of two lovely classrooms, with hardwood floors, new desks, two libraries, a science labratory, four typewriters and other essential materials to assist the pupils in their strive for learning.

The first teachers to teach in the school were Miss L. Mackie, in the Junior room and Mr. Van Horne in the senior room.

In our school the highest grade is ten. In future years we hope it will be grade twelve.

In its five years of existence the Benalto School has had six teachers; three in the junior room and three in the senior, each playing a roll which guided the pupils toward success.

Surrounding the school we have a beautiful yard occupying approximately two acres. The yard consists of softball, football, tennis and basketball courts. A large lawn partially surrounds the school.

Beautiful flowers were planted along the side of the concrete walk to the main door of the school.

In the spring of 1939, the children planted two large rows of windblown poplars on the northern side of the school. Every year since then they have been cultivated and are now quite high and look very lovely.

Mrs. Sterling and Mr. Davidson, with the help of the children and parents planted beautiful flowers at the front of the school. At the same time spruce trees were planted along Nevis Street, which as years go by will become stately evergreens.

The Benalto school children are very proud of their school and school grounds. In a contest held by the Rocky Mountain House School Division, for the loveliest school yard, Benalto rated second.

This school is our means of education and if well kept will be considered an asset to the community.

Benalto

1938

Junior Room

Senior Room

Senior Class Room.

Junior Class Room.